

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever

What is Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is a serious, generalized infection that is usually spread to people through the bite of infected ticks. The illness gets its name from the Rocky Mountain area where it was first identified, but it also occurs in other parts of the U.S.

How do people get Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

People usually get Rocky Mountain spotted fever from the bite of an infected tick. The tick must attach to the skin and feed for at least four hours before it can transmit Rocky Mountain spotted fever. A person can also get the illness when crushed tissue or feces from the tick gets into a cut in the skin or into the mucous membranes. The disease is not spread from person to person, except in rare cases through blood transfusion.

What are the symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever usually appear between 3 to 14 days after the tick bite. They include the sudden onset of a fever, which may then last for two or three weeks, severe headache, tiredness, deep muscle pain, chills or nausea. In about half of the cases, a red, raised rash appears on the arms and legs, particularly on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. The rash then spreads to the trunk.

What is the treatment for Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be treated with antibiotics and needs to be treated promptly, or it can be fatal. Many people with the illness have to be hospitalized.

How can I protect myself against Rocky Mountain spotted fever?

The best protection against the illness is to avoid tick bites.

- Avoid tick-infested areas, especially during the warmer months.
- Wear light-colored clothing so ticks can easily be seen and removed. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, hat and long pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.
- Check your body every few hours for ticks when you spend a lot of time outdoors in tick-infested areas. Ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms and legs or where tight-fitting clothing has been.
- Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on clothing. **Permethrin should only be used on clothing.** Be sure to follow directions on the container and wash off repellents when going back indoors. Carefully read the manufacturer's label on repellents before using on children.
- Remove attached ticks immediately.

If I am bitten by a tick, what should I do?

- Ticks should be removed promptly and carefully by using tweezers and applying gentle, steady traction.
- Do not crush the tick's body when removing it. Apply the tweezers as close to the skin as possible to avoid leaving tick mouthparts in the skin.
- Do not remove ticks with your bare hands. Protect your hands with gloves, cloth or a tissue. Be sure to wash your hands after removing a tick.
- After removing the tick, disinfect the skin with soap and water or other available disinfectants.
- Watch for unusual symptoms and contact your health care provider if they develop.